

MARKETING *Benchmarks*

How to get more B2B envelopes opened

Whenever sales slacken and profits head south, most companies start to beat the bushes in search of new customers.

It is a vital – but costly – process.

Consultant Celine Horan writes to pinpoint X ways to get your prospect-search mailings opened – instead of landing in the round file.

Target the right people

All you want from a new-business mailing is a nibble from a person in a position both to express interest in your offer – and to spark action on it. Muscle up your list with people with carefully selected titles and functions. Don't waste money on mailings to secretaries, or to CEOs (excepting small-business owners).

Make an intriguing offer

Most business-to-business prospect mailings aim to generate an appointment for a face-to-face sales call.

You know that, and so does your recipient. Yet it is utterly poisonous to say so in your mailing. The reason: a meeting benefits you (you hope), but not your prospective customer.

Instead of saying, "Dear Mr. Smith: I'd like to have 15 minutes of your time," write something like, "Dear Mr. Smith: I have news for you that could save your company \$185,000 a year."

Put your ducks in a row

Research your prospect's company, its industry, and its problems. Make sure that your sales staff can handle your anticipated responses quickly (the Direct Marketing Association says that about 3.4% is average for B2B mailings).

Prepare a telephone script, citing your offer, for follow-up calls.

Have your presentation documents, and your post-meeting thank-you note, ready well in advance.

Add every respondent to your marketing data base.

Ms. Horan tells the story of how one company, dissatisfied with its usual B2B mailing results, tried to break out of the pack.

"Direct mail influences more purchase decisions than any of the "new" media."

— BIGresearch

It decided to abandon its traditional letter mailing and send sales prospects a compact disc with a powerful jacket illustration and the prospect's name on its jacket.

It also opted to send the mailing by FedEx. (Since that costs far more than the post office, the company went over its list with a sharp eye and weeded out all but its best sales prospects.)

Various people, especially the bean counters, held their breaths when the package went out. But the results more than justified the promotion's expense:

The package's response rate hit 30%.

More to the point, 6% of the responding prospects became customers immediately. And a third of them became continuing accounts.

The promotion delivered a \$500,000 net profit margin within its first year.



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